

VZCZCXRO1439
PP RUEHAG RUEHDF RUEHIK RUEHLZ RUEHROV RUEHSL RUEHSR
DE RUEHVL #0455/01 2381108
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 261108Z AUG 09 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY VILNIUS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3700
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEAUSA/DEPT OF HHS WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHPH/CDC ATLANTA GA PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 VILNIUS 000455

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (HHS ADDRESS ADDED)

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KFLU](#) [TBIO](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [LH](#)

SUBJECT: H1N1: LITHUANIA'S PREPARATION FOR PANDEMIC LACKS
URGENCY

VILNIUS 00000455 001.2 OF 002

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Health officials in Lithuania are in only the early stages of domestic planning for a possible H1N1 flu pandemic, but say that they are confident they will be prepared and protected should one occur. As of August 21 Lithuania has reported 47 confirmed H1N1 flu cases, none fatal, with a few new cases being reported each day, on average. The Ministry of Health has asked for millions of additional dollars from the government budget to buy antiviral drugs and vaccine, but the GOL has yet to act on the request, and, in any case, is making severe budget cuts to deal with its financial crisis. The GOL does have an emergency-action plan that would go into effect should there be a pandemic, but such preparations likely would be insufficient to deal with a serious pandemic. Post's working group on H1N1 flu has met and reviewed the embassy's preparations for a pandemic. End summary.

2. (U) Nearly all of the 47 H1N1 cases in Lithuania so far have involved people who had recently returned from other countries or who have been in close contact with such travelers. None of the cases have been fatal, only a few patients have required hospitalization, and most patients have already fully recovered. Greta Amasenkovaitė, public-health specialist at the GOL's Center for Prevention and Control of Communicable Diseases, said she thought there were very few undetected H1N1 cases because of all the publicity that H1N1 flu had received. Anyone showing any flu symptoms, she said, has been scared enough to go see a doctor. Viktorija Jasulaitienė, deputy director of the center, said she did not expect a large increase in the number of H1N1 patients this fall, because most cases so far have involved those who traveled abroad and the poor economic situation means "there are fewer visits abroad this year than in the past."

3. (U) Jasulaitienė said the GOL was "doing a lot of prevention activities" through the media. Asked for specifics, she said that her center and the Ministry of Health update their websites every day and have flu-prevention information on them. Although government agencies did work with media when H1N1 was first reported in North America last spring, they have done little since then to produce or encourage public-service announcements or information on how to minimize the risk of flu.

4. (U) Ministry of Health officials told us that they have participated in European and national flu pandemic exercises, and continue to refine the GOL's emergency action plan to deal with a flu pandemic. The Ministry has been working with hospitals, health agencies, and local governments to help them develop plans on how to operate during an influenza

pandemic. But that planning has not passed the stage of requesting information from those entities and waiting for responses. The ministry also has discussed the possibility of mass school closings with education officials, but said there were no concrete contingency plans on that front. There are no plans to teach schoolchildren behaviors to minimize transmission risk.

15. (U) Health ministry officials told us that hospitals would be able to free up enough beds to accommodate H1N1 patients should a pandemic hit, though they admit they don't yet have such data from hospitals. A doctor at the main infectious-disease hospital in Vilnius said his hospital would be able to provide as many as 90 beds. (Vilnius has about 600,000 residents.) But the doctor said that wouldn't be necessary, as there would be no pandemic. The GOL does have an emergency-action plan that would be activated if 30 percent of medical personnel and public-safety personnel such as police and firefighters were incapacitated. But the only element of the plan that health officials could readily describe was a provision that ensures high-risk groups and emergency-services and medical personnel would have top priority for flu vaccinations.

16. (U) The Ministry of Health has requested 5 million LTL (just over 2 million USD) to increase its stockpile of antiviral drugs and 50 million LTL (just over 20 million USD) for enough flu vaccine to inoculate 30 percent of the population. Thus far, the government has not acted on those requests. Because of the financial crisis, the GOL has been making drastic budget cuts in recent months. Viktoras Meizis, head of the International Relations Department of the Health Ministry, said several countries, including Lithuania, have asked the European Commission to create a common stockpile of vaccine for smaller countries so that they wouldn't be shut out of the market by larger countries placing larger orders.

VILNIUS 00000455 002.2 OF 002

17. (U) Post convened a working group on August 19 to review preparedness for wider spread of the flu. We have shared information with schools that have American-citizen students, and have reminded all Mission staffers of basic precautions to take to minimize risks of flu exposure. The working group, spearheaded by the medical office and the ESTH officer, continues to monitor the flu situation in Lithuania.

18. (SBU) Comment: Lithuania so far has not been hit nearly as hard by the H1N1 flu virus as some European countries, which is fortunate given that planning for a pandemic appears to be inadequate and lackadaisical. Worse, the country's medical bureaucracy do not seem to think faster or more concentrated planning is needed. We will continue to monitor Lithuania's preparations for a pandemic, encourage them to plan, and will seek ways to assist the GOL should the pandemic deepen here. End comment.
LEADER